

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

Frequently Asked Questions

GENERAL QUESTIONS

- 1. Q. When are the 2022 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) awards announced?**

A. The 2022 SCBGP awards will be announced in Fall 2022. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has final approval of all proposals awarded funding; therefore, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) cannot announce awards until final approval from USDA has been received.

- 2. Q. Is a recording or PowerPoint of the 2022 SCBGP Grant Proposal webinar available?**

A. Links to a recording of the 2022 Grant Proposal webinar will be posted to the [CDFA SCBGP website](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/SCBGP) (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/) following the final webinar. PDF copies of the PowerPoint presentations will be available for download during the webinar or upon request via email to grants@cdfa.ca.gov. In addition, answers to questions received during both webinars will be incorporated into the weekly Questions & Answers (Q&A) posted to CDFA's website.

- 3. Q. Do any of the Grant Proposal attachments have a page limit?**

A. The only Grant Proposal attachment with a page limit is the Project Objectives and Work Plan, which cannot exceed five pages. The Outcome Measures, Budget Narrative, and Cost Sharing attachments do not have a maximum number of pages; however, content on these templates should be appropriate, necessary, and responsive to the intended purpose of the form. Providing additional content in an attachment to circumvent the character limitation for a question in FFAST (e.g., providing additional information on project purpose within the Outcome Measures template) may result in disqualification.

- 4. Q. How can applicants access the Technical Review Committee (TRC) and CDFA Administrative Feedback for their Concept Proposals in the Financial Assistance Application Tool (FAAST)?**

A. To view feedback for a Concept Proposal, log on to the [FAAST system](https://faast.waterboards.ca.gov/) (<https://faast.waterboards.ca.gov/>) with the username and password used to

submit the Concept Proposal. Click on Submitted Applications, select the project's title and click on the Feedback tab. If the Concept Proposal feedback is not viewable in FFAST for any reason, please contact CDFA via grants@cdfa.ca.gov for assistance. To maintain the integrity of the competitive process, CDFA is unable to provide applicants with clarification on feedback provided in FFAST.

5. **Q. Can applicants include other attachments outside of the required or optional attachments described in the 2022 Grant Proposal Instructions?**
 - A. Attachments other than the required or optional attachments detailed in the Grant Proposal Instructions, including links embedded in the FFAST application or required attachments, are highly discouraged. TRC members are not required to review extraneous attachments or hyperlinks. Proposals that include additional attachments that circumvent the character limitations within the FFAST system or page limits of any template may be disqualified.

6. **Q. Can project activities occur before November 1, 2022 or after April 30, 2025? If so, can the costs of those activities be charged to the grant?**
 - A. Expenses for activities occurring before November 1, 2022 or after April 30, 2025 cannot be charged to the grant. Applicants may use cost sharing to fund activities prior to the start of the grant duration at the risk that grant funding is not subsequently received. Additionally, recipients may request a one-time extension of up to 60 calendar days due to extraordinary circumstances. Requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Reference the Project Management section of the Grant Management Procedures Manual available on the [CDFA SCBGP Grant Recipient Resources website](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/SCBGP/GrantRecipientResources) (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/RecipientResources.html) for more information.

7. **Q. Can substantial changes be made to the project described in the Concept Proposal?**
 - A. Applicants may revise and refine their project during the Grant Proposal phase. Some degree of change is anticipated in response to Grant Proposal requirements and feedback provided; however, substantial changes are discouraged. CDFA cannot anticipate how changes to the scope of a project will be viewed by the TRC.

8. **Q. Can applicants be awarded funding for more than one SCBGP project?**
- A. Applicants may be awarded funding for more than one SCBGP project; however, duplication of costs or activities is not permitted. In addition, applicants should ensure they have adequate capacity to effectively manage multiple SCBGP awards.
9. **Q Are applicants required to obtain a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number prior to submitting a Grant Proposal? What is a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)?**
- A. The federal government will no longer be using the Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number to uniquely identify entities registered in the System of Award Management (SAM) beginning April 4, 2022. Entities doing business with the federal government will instead use a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) created at SAM.gov. Active registrants will have their UEI assigned and viewable within SAM.gov.
10. **Q. Are applicants required to register with SAM prior to submitting a Grant Proposal?**
- A. Registering with SAM is not required prior to submitting a Grant Proposal. However, successful 2022 applicants will be required to be registered with SAM before SCBGP funds are awarded. Applicants are highly encouraged to begin the registration process now as the process can be lengthy. Note that failure to register and maintain an active SAM account will prevent an organization from receiving federal funds. SAM accounts must be renewed annually.
11. **Q. The Review Process section of the Grant Proposal Instructions states that there are other factors beyond the TRC scores and feedback that will determine which proposals will be submitted to USDA. Does this mean that a proposal that receives a lower score could be funded over a proposal with a higher score?**
- A. While scoring by the TRC is the most substantial factor in selecting proposals, it is possible for a lower scoring proposal to receive funding over a proposal with a higher score.

12. Q. The phrase “solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops” was removed from the SCBGP under the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (Farm Bill). How does this change the program and can funds now benefit non-specialty crops?

A. The removal of this phrase does not substantially change the SCBGP, rather, this amendment and the additional Farm Bill language that replaced this phrase, clarifies methods through which specialty crop competitiveness may be enhanced. These methods were largely already present in CDFA program priorities. This language also supports that some projects may have an ancillary benefit to non-specialty crops while primarily benefiting specialty crops. SCBGP funds still cannot directly benefit an ineligible commodity or provide a benefit or profit to a single organization, institution, or individual.

FUNDING AREA AND FUNDING CATEGORY

1. Q. Can a Grant Proposal be submitted under a different funding category than the Concept Proposal?

A. A Grant Proposal cannot be submitted under a different funding category than the Concept Proposal.

FAAST APPLICATION

1. Q. How can applicants access the Grant Proposal application in FAAST?

A. To view the Grant Proposal application, log onto the [FAAST system](https://faast.waterboards.ca.gov) (<https://faast.waterboards.ca.gov>) with the username and password used to submit the Concept Proposal. Click on Active Applications, select the project’s title and click on the Questionnaire tab.

2. Q. Are there character limits for each section of the Grant Proposal application in FAAST?

A. FAAST imposes text box character limits, clearly marked in red text at the bottom of each text box. The character limits range from 100 to 4,000 characters including letters, numbers, spaces, punctuation, and hidden formatting code. Figures, images, tables, and hyperlinks are not allowed.

3. Q. Can figures, pictures, or tables be included in the proposal?

A. The FAAST system is text based and not designed to facilitate figures, pictures, or tables. Additionally, projects selected for funding must conform with the application formatting requirements developed by USDA for this program so attachments should not be altered to include figures, pictures, or additional tables.

OTHER SUPPORT FROM FEDERAL OR STATE GRANT PROGRAMS

1. **Q. Should an applicant inform CDFA if they applied to another agency to fund a project submitted to the 2022 SCBGP? What if both agencies agree to fund the project?**
 - A. An applicant must inform CDFA if they apply and/or receive funding for a project that has been submitted to the 2022 SCBGP. SCBGP funds cannot duplicate activities supported by other state or federal programs. If awarded funding from another source, applicants must either demonstrate that funds from each program will go towards different activities or decline funding from one program or the other.

2. **Q. Are there other forms of federal or state assistance applicants are required to disclose?**
 - A. If an applicant has applied for or received direct COVID-19 assistance to cover costs for personnel that will also be supported with SCBGP funding (e.g.: a forgiven Paycheck Protection Program loan or a California Small Business COVID-19 Relief Grant) that assistance should also be disclosed.

EXTERNAL PROJECT SUPPORT

1. **Q. Who should be listed in the External Project Support response?**
 - A. The External Project Support response should identify at least one specific specialty crop stakeholder and explain why they believe the project is important and timely for the specialty crop industry. Specialty crop stakeholders include individuals/organizations involved in the specialty crop industry such as growers, companies, certified crop advisors and pest control advisors, commodity boards or commissions, trade associations, etc. The External Project Support response should not reference the applicant. In addition, members of the general public, legislators, or any organizations that are not affiliated with the specialty crop industry should not be included in the External Project Support response.

2. **Q. Are letters of support required?**
 - A. Letters of support are not a requirement of the SCBGP but are strongly encouraged to demonstrate industry support for a project. Letters of support should not be provided in lieu of a narrative response to the External Project Support question.

3. Q. Who should submit letters of support?

A. Letters of support may come from specialty crop stakeholders, individuals, and organizations that are supportive of what the project will accomplish but who are not directly involved in project activities. Do not include letters of support from the applicant, contractors, or any other entity that will participate, receive project funding, or contribute cost share. Letters of support from project beneficiaries are appropriate, so long as the benefit received is not in the form of grant funding. For example, letters of support from specialty crop farmers who will receive training through the grant are appropriate; letters of support from the employees of the applicant or a contractor are not. In addition, do not include letters of support from members of the general public, legislators, elected officials, or any organizations that are not affiliated with the specialty crop industry.

4. Q. How should letters of support be submitted?

A. Letters of support should be written on the stakeholder's official letterhead, be addressed to CDFA Office of Grants Administration, and explain why the stakeholder supports the project. All letters of support must be attached to the Grant Proposal application in FFAST; letters sent directly to CDFA via mail or email will not be considered. Applicants should attach LOS in PDF format using the following file naming convention: LOS1, LOS2, LOS3, etc.

OUTCOME MEASURES

1. Q. Can the Outcome Measures template that was submitted for the Concept Proposal be submitted for the Grant Proposal?

A. The Outcome Measures template that was submitted for the Concept Proposal may be submitted for the Grant Proposal. However, applicants should review and consider any Concept Proposal feedback that was provided by CDFA and/or the TRC regarding the Outcome Measures. In addition, if the project has changed from the Concept Proposal to the Grant Proposal, this may need to be reflected in the Outcome Measures template.

2. Q. Can the Grant Proposal identify different outcome measures and indicators than those listed in the Concept Proposal?

A. Applicants may select different outcome measures and indicators from the Concept Proposal to the Grant Proposal phase.

3. **Q. Do all Outcome Measures have to be achievable within the grant duration?**
 - A. All outcome measures must be achievable within the grant duration. Applicants should not overstate outcomes or select outcomes and indicators that cannot reasonably be achieved within the grant duration in an effort to improve the likelihood of funding. The number of outcomes selected is not a factor in scoring criteria; however, failure to successfully achieve outcome measures may adversely affect an applicant's ability to receive funding in the future.

4. **Q. When does Indicator 1.5 have to be selected for Outcome Measure 1?**
 - A. Outcome Measure 1.5 is required for all proposals submitted to the Grown in California funding category and all marketing and promotion projects. However, only one of the sub-indicators (a, b, or c) must be selected.

BUDGET NARRATIVE

1. **Q. Can the amount of SCBGP funding requested change from the Concept Proposal phase to the Grant Proposal phase?**
 - A. The amount of SCBGP funding requested in the Grant Proposal phase may increase or decrease from the Concept Proposal phase. Although there is no limit on the amount that the budget may change, CDFA cannot anticipate how changes will be viewed by the TRC and substantial changes (plus or minus 20 percent) may be questioned. If the budget changes, ensure the revised amount is between \$100,000 and \$500,000 and update the amount listed under Funds Requested on the Project Budget tab in FFAST.

2. **Q. What is the limit for compensation for individual contractors/consultants?**
 - A. Individual contractual fees should be reasonable and consistent with fees in the marketplace for similar services. Salary and wages or fees for professional services for contractors/consultants cannot exceed the [GS-15 step 10](https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/) (<https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>) for the applicant's locality/area without justification. A justification for an individual contractor/consultant may include but is not limited to: a cost/price analysis; an explanation of unique qualifications, special expertise due to the complexity of the project/task or limited pool of available or qualified contractors/consultants; or historical data supporting the rate charged by contractors/consultants. Reference the [Procuring Goods and Services Using Federal Funds Supplement](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/SCBGP_Procuring_Goods_and_Services.pdf) (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/SCBGP_Procuring_Goods_and_Services.pdf) for additional guidance on contractual restrictions.

3. **Q. Can applicants request indirect costs greater than eight (8) percent of the total personnel costs?**
- A. The indirect cost rate for the SCBGP is established in federal statute. The statutory limitation of eight (8) percent of total costs is the maximum which State Departments of Agriculture may claim in their applications to USDA, including the state's administration and any indirect passed through to subrecipients. USDA gives State Departments of Agriculture broad discretion whether and how much, if any, indirect will pass through to subrecipients with many states not allowing applicants to collect any indirect. While it is CDFA's intent to allow applicants to receive the maximum amount of available funding, CDFA must retain a portion of the allowed indirect to carry out the activities needed to administer the program. Accordingly, CDFA will not accept requests for indirect costs greater than eight (8) percent of total personnel costs and excessive indirect costs may result in disqualification.
4. **Q. Can applicants use grant funds to give away specialty crop commodities?**
- A. The cost to purchase or grow specialty crop commodities and any other costs associated with facilitating a donation of those specialty crops are unallowable costs. Projects that focus primarily on donating or distributing donated food may want to consider the alternative funding opportunities described in the [Request for Concept Proposals](#) (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/2022_SCBGP_RequestForConceptProposals.pdf) and on the [CDFA grants website](#) (<http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/grants/>), or consider securing cost share to cover unallowable costs and activities cost sharing.
5. **Q. Is cost share a requirement of the SCBGP?**
- A. Cost share is not a requirement of the SCBGP, is generally discouraged by USDA, and is not a factor in scoring criteria in either phase of the application process. Additionally, cost sharing will create ongoing administrative obligations as applicants will be required to report on cost share throughout the duration of the project, if selected for funding.
6. **Q. What is the difference between matching funds and in-kind contributions?**
- A. Matching funds refers to real dollar contributions to a project from sources other than the SCBGP. In-kind contributions refer to the determined values of assets donated to the project (e.g., equipment, use of land, volunteered staff time, etc.). If matching funds and/or in-kind contributions have been secured for the project, applicants must complete and attach the Cost Sharing template.

7. **Q. Can other state or federal grants be treated as cost share? Can SCBGP funds be reported as cost share for another grant?**
- A. Generally, funds from one grant program cannot be treated as cost share for another grant program unless permitted in the terms and conditions of that grant program. The federal SCBGP terms and conditions do not have such a provision and SCBGP funds cannot be reported as cost share for another grant.

PROJECT OVERSIGHT

1. **Q. Who should provide resumes or curriculum vitae (CV)s?**
- A. Resumes or CVs (whichever is most applicable) should be provided for the Project Director, Project Manager, Project Investigator, and/or collaborators who will receive a portion of the grant funds. The preferred format for resumes or curriculum vitae is PDF.

GRANT MANAGEMENT

1. **Q. How will an applicant be reimbursed for allowable costs incurred throughout the grant?**
- A. Generally, recipients submit invoices to CDFA for reimbursement of actual expenses. Invoices must be submitted at least quarterly, but no more frequently than monthly. In some circumstances, recipients may also request advance payments. Reference the Invoicing section of the Grant Management Procedures Manual available on the [CDFA SCBGP Grant Recipient Resources website](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/RecipientResources.html) (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/RecipientResources.html) for more information regarding payment of grant awards.